

*The long overdue reauthorization improves and expands the program*

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(201) 222-2828

Contact: Olga Alvarez

(Washington, D.C.) - Congressman Albio Sires voted today to reauthorize Head Start, a program that prepares children from birth to five years to arrive at kindergarten with the best possible skills to succeed. H.R. 1429, Improving Head Start Act of 2007, not only expands access to Head Start and improves classroom and teacher quality, it also ensures that funds are utilized efficiently.

"The Head Start Program has proven to be an important resource because it levels the playing field for low-income children and their families," said Congressman Sires. "Education is the best tool we can provide to our younger generations; it lays the foundation for success, and makes our economy more competitive globally."

Head Start, the national early education program that has served more than 20 million children and their families for over 40 years, helps preschoolers develop early reading and math skills. The program also provides educational, health, nutritional, and social services to children and their families, while engaging parents in their children's learning.

The authorization for the Head Start Program expired in FY 2003. The previous two Congresses have failed to send a bill to the President's desk. H.R. 1429, Improving Head Start Act of 2007, expands services to 10,000 more children, and it:

- increases teacher qualification requirements,
- directs new funds toward program improvement activities,
- ensures research-based practices to support children's vocabulary skills,
- uses the latest science on early brain development to strengthen school readiness and,
- expands services to additional Migrant and Indian Head Start Programs.

An important provision in this bill increases the fiscal controls used by Head Start at the federal and local levels to ensure funds are being used appropriately. Underperforming programs will now have to recompete for their grants, ensuring that they improve or be replaced with more productive procedures.

"It is invaluable to have preschoolers prepared for the educational and social challenges that lie ahead for them," said Congressman Sires. "That is why it is so important that Head Start and Early Head Start focus not only on the child but also the parents. Family involvement has been the key to Head Start's success."